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Two problems which the language arts teacher encounters are the effect of science on language teaching and the nation's commitment to "excellence for all" as measured by objective examination. Scientists, who value exactness, objectivity, and control, have imposed their values on language and have attempted to construct machines that will use and create language in a human fashion. Although the language teacher values precision and economy, he must emphasize that language is also subjective, emotional, inspirational, and aesthetic. The second problem, the present fetish with "excellence," has three parts: the questionable value of demanding excellence in the many rather than the few, the difficulty of forming a workable definition of excellence and standards for measuring it, and the fact that, in a changing world, today's excellence may be tommorrow's ignorance. The language teacher must emphasize the value of language as a humanizing instrument with the capability to transcent time; and because of his effect on children, he must be aware that he is teaching students how to live. (LH)

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WILLIAM A. JENKINS

# Time That Is Intolerant

I take my title from an American poet's elegy to one of his Irish contemporaries. In his poem, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," W. H. Auden wrote:

> Time that is intolerant
> Of the brave and innocent
> And indifferent in a week
>
> To a beautiful physique,
> Worships language and forgives
> Everyone by whom it lives . . . .[1] *

For our purpose here it matters not that Yeats was a Nobel prize winner, nor that in various quarters he was considered a fool, a Fascist, and the greatest twentieth century poet writing in English. Our focus will be the truth in Auden's lines.

Time, indeed, is intolerant—of man's inertia, rigidity, and myopia. Man at times wallows in self-pity at his time-bound, space-bound state, forgetting that his bondage permits a span of seven or eight decades in time, and optimum mobility on a celestial body of major proportions. Too frequently the facts of his state dull man's sensibilities to our potential.

The tolerance of time for the pure, the unique, the truthful and the esthetic in language can be established by a brief glance at the men of letters, the classic pieces of literature, the translations, and the adaptations which are timeless and still timely. Great is the intolerance of time for that which is impure, trite, false, and commonplace.

I should like to advance the thesis that we whose business, most simply put, is language, are remiss in upholding our sacred trust if we fail to utilize this natural condition in our beliefs, our objectives, and our assessment of our failures and successes. The proclivities and propensities of our fellow men to worship the unique, the beautiful, the stimulating, and the emotive powers of language provide us with impetus to scale Parnassus. But at the same time, like Icarus, our ascension can be short-lived should we ignore certain very elementary laws. The dangers abound about us, like branches hanging low over the trail, or the unseen stone which trips us, or the unfriendly creatures of nature who resent our passing. The trail to Parnassus indeed lies before us, as ever it will to those whose business is words; but the journey requires effort and caution. Let me share with you from my thinking on the dangers along the trail, or if you will, Time's intolerance. I would like to address myself to two major ideas: first, the role of science as it affects the language arts teacher's work, and second, our nation's commitment to valuing excellence.

## *Language Is Humanizer*

Language is the prime humanistic instrument. I dare say it is more basic than reason in making us human, for it is at once both the tool and the product of reason. Theological considerations aside, it appears self-evident to many of us that "In the beginning was the word."

But language, more than ever, today is not the province only of the humanist and the artist. The scientist, who prizes preci-

[1] From *Another Time* (Random House, Inc.) by W. H. Auden, copyright 1940 by W. H. Auden, and from *Collected Shorter Poems 1930-1944* (Faber & Faber, Ltd.). By permission.

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*Also from COLLECTED SHORTER POEMS 1927-1957, by W. H. Auden (Random House, Inc.).

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sion, objectivity, and control has superimposed his values on language. At one extreme the scientist is attempting to create machines which will use and create language as human beings do. At the other extreme, in the last decade the scientist has found it necessary to create a system of first principles by which to assess and guide his endeavors. The creation of a philosophy of science has highlighted the need for humanistic considerations even in scientific enterprises.

*Science Concerned with Language*

Research on the science of bionics, artificial intelligence, sometimes called "intellectronics," is proceeding at M.I.T.'s Lincoln Laboratory. Attempts to simulate the activity of the brain in choosing among alternative plans of action, problem solving, promise to offer the teacher great knowledge to bring to bear on helping children solve problems in using language. It has been found, for example, that given a set of criteria, a machine can make choices similar to those most men will make. The former assumption that the choice would be affected by relationships among the criteria themselves appears a false one.

Man is able to recognize the letter *R* whether it is large or small, near or far, printed or written, upside down or sideways, sloppily or carefully written, or whether it is printed in any of a great number of typefaces. His brain extracts a common element in the form and discards others, such as serifs and extraneous curves. Machines are being built to do these things too.

In a recent issue of *Fortune*[2] John Pfeiffer reported that a computer at the Lincoln Laboratory distinguishes samples of hand-printed letters by noting curved strokes, vertical lines, crossbars, and twenty-five other features. A "listening" computer at the Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratories recognizes written or spoken one-syllable words, and enough is known at present to build a machine that could handle 500 or more such discrete words. It is reasonably well established that at the basic level the brain and the computers operate similarly. Computers copy, erase, compare and transfer symbols of experience which are input, just as the brain does. Mr. Pfeiffer characterizes man as "slow, sloppy, and brilliant thinker"; the computers he sees as "fast, accurate, and stupid," with little that can be done to reduce the difference in speed.

The point of all of this is that men, in their intolerance for their own limitations in performing certain operations involving language, are turning to other devices to increase efficiency. Voice typewriters, research scanners, book digesters, and other equipment capable of responding directly to verbal commands are the objectives. Perhaps we shall learn more about obtaining effective language patterns from this research. Perhaps the machines will teach us much. Perhaps they will become our masters.

But there is more involved here than is obvious at first glance. Precision, economy, effectiveness and objectivity—the aims of science—are also the aims of the language arts teacher. Long has he striven to obtain them, with only moderate success. At some future date perhaps he can abdicate in favor of an electronic console. Perhaps he should.

One fact which is distressingly clear is that just as we are now receiving the first shock waves from a population explosion, simultaneously the foundations of our way of life are vibrating from the tremors taking place as man's knowledge explodes. Today it is impossible to know all there is to know in any one discipline, or even sub-

[2] "Problems, Too, Have Problems," October, 1961

discipline. Knowledge is growing at such a pace that it is impossible to keep abreast of it. The more critical task of knowing what should be known about this knowledge staggers the most imaginative person. Perhaps machines can help us to store and order such knowledge until it can be assimilated, evaluated, and put to general use in making life a more rewarding time-space experience.

So far I—and most of the scientists and scholars who daily labor in this esoteric world—have carefully chosen the verbs to be applied to these machines. They can *sort, store, classify, order, record, transcribe,* and *repeat* language and language elements. In their behavior they can be *objective, accurate, fast,* and *tireless,* in operation.

*Language Is More Than a Science*

You and I know that thought and language contain other equally important elements. Language must also be *subjective, emotional, inspirational* and *esthetic,* to mention just four qualities. One dares not say that machines will never be developed which can create language with these qualities, for in our world today's fancy is tomorrow's reality. Such electronic devices still appear to be some time away. In that interval, I propose that we teachers continue to employ the lessons which we have learned from science—the method of fact, logic, and objectivity—but that now we turn to the method of intuition, feeling, imagination.

The dropping of pebbles in a pool, the contemplation of cloud creatures, the idle pastime of wondering why grass is green or why human beings attend conventions when they fall asleep in meetings, are paths leading to Parnassus, just as making clean atomic bombs, and finding the eye of a hurricane are. We have long known that reading nonsense books by Lewis Carroll and Dr. Seuss has values not found in social studies or science texts.

Imagination, basically, reveals a love of life or one aspect of life. When one imagines, he totally involves self in one aspect of being. His absorption is almost total. His inclination to involve his ego is at its zenith. His creative potential is energized. His insight into facts can then be as penetrating as possible.

Foster imagination, I say, for it is as sure a route to knowledge as is the way of fact. Moreover, only imagination can lead you to be sensitive to the value of facts. We can offer facts about facts and still be unable to make a value judgment, to break out of a closed circle and find meaning for humanity in the facts.

We often forget that the way of science is merely a means of ordering knowledge, creating it and testing it. But imagination also creates knowledge, for the true scientist begins by imagining. Then he tests, and so on.

Our domain—the humanities—deplores knowledge devoid of value and action devoid of grace. We are interested in the quality of an act. We know that noble deeds flow out of contemplation and delight. We know that the essence of life is love; the way we love determines what we are; and the intensity of our love determines the permanence and depth of what we do. At a previous NCTE convention, we were told, "What thou lovest well remains."

This I say to you as teachers of the language arts: with equal firmness and confidence teach the truth of the scientist and the truth of the poet, for neither paradigm of truth is in itself sufficient. Adopt the ebullient self-confidence of the scientist, for your business is words, and words, not science, have made us human. To paraphrase John Ciardi, the only difference between a civilized person and a savage is that the savage has not received enough

news—that is, words—from mankind. I have to conclude that though he traded his spear for an atomic weapon, the savage would remain uncivilized. The atomic weapon could not substitute for words.

### *Our Concern with Excellence*

Let me now turn to my second proposal.

We in education seek panaceas and adopt fads. Unfortunately, they come and go like double-breasted suits, the Charleston, jigsaw puzzles, and Hula Hoops. In my relatively brief professional career I have come under the spell of group dynamics, semantics, and the usage approach to validating correctness in language. Progressive education had its hey-day before my time, and linguistics is just now appearing on the scene in dress less esoteric than when developed by Jesperson and Bloomfield.

I decry the fact that the panaceas at times have been superimposed by forces outside the profession. Such is the case with today's savior, *Excellence*! Please don't misunderstand. I hold no brief for non-excellence, but I wonder where the public's faith in this magical word will lead us, what travesties will be committed in its name, and what group will use it to promote its own ends as has been done with *Americanism, patriotism, loyalty,* and even *democracy.*

The problem with excellence is threefold. First, there is the question of numbers. Second, we must define our term. Finally, we must face the realities of our changing world.

Professor Foshay of Columbia University raises the question of numbers this way: ". . . . No other nation has asked excellence save for the few. *We* must have excellence for the many."[3]

Back in sixth grade I learned that most adjectives and adverbs described qualities and conditions that could exist to a lesser or greater degree. *Excellent* could be intensified with *more* and *most,* or diminished with *less* and *least.* When I developed some semblance of sixth grade sophistication, I substituted for degrees, and ended with the scheme *good, better, best;* or *poor, fair, good* and *excellent.* Actually, in second second grade I learned that *poor* would frequently be checked on my report card. How, I wondered, could I reach the blissful state of being graded *excellent*? But even in sixth grade I learned that some of us will always be other than excellent. If we were all alike, we could be many things, but we could not *all* be excellent. Today we are told that all of our pupils ought to attain this condition.

In earnestness, I must now say that excellence for all may well reduce itself to excellence for the few, as has been the case in Europe for many years. In France, for example, families tutor children for months to help them pass dread examinations which will determine the adolescent's entire educational, and therefore, social and economic future.

### *Excellence in Education*

*Excellence* and *education* are not synonymous. In many high schools today excellence means success on college entrance tests. Scoring well on such examinations is desirable, just as is earning good grades in school. But such excellence is too narrow. Professor McClelland of the Center for Research in Personality at Harvard University has tentatively identified three other types of excellence, none of which can be identified with academic success.

One of these is the "need for achievement," the desire to do a good job of work. This is not a need for academic success, but success in such endeavors as salesmanship, where the problems are not posed by others, but by the individual himself. Such

[3] "A Proposal for the Improvement of Education," *Educational Leadership,* May, 1961.

persons do not usually win teacher approval, yet they are successes in life.

Professor McClelland continues:[4]

> "Or consider another example—curiosity. . . . Curiosity may be defined as a desire to know, or as the knowledge of, things one is not supposed to know; whereas academic excellence is defined as knowing what one is supposed to know or has been taught. To test for curiosity, one might have to inquire into matters that the student had not been taught at all or that he could not be expected to know because of insufficient background in his previous training or in the test itself. . . ."

In a third type of excellence Professor McClelland states that women achieve more readily than men. Without it life would hardly be worth living. McClelland characterizes these excellences as "sensitivity to other human beings, compassion, richness and variety of imaginative life, or a lifelong concern for a particular scientific problem, whether one is paid to work on it or not." The questions must be asked: Can the school teach and grade curiosity, the need for achievement, imaginativeness, and sensitivity? Because they are difficult to measure should they be ignored?

Excellence is often equated with hard work. But long ago many of us learned that the difference between work and play is a mere matter of attitude. Play is work that one enjoys; or to put philosophically, that which one *loves*. If undertakings in school can be enjoyed, so much the better, for we become as we love.

Excellence is often equated with quantity. But it is now established that no one can ever hope to learn all that could be learned about anything. Perhaps an ambition is to teach one to prize learning as a personal accomplishment rather than to accept it as that which one is forced to do. Louis T. Benezet, president of Colorado College, writing in *Saturday Review*,[5] recently described the bandwagon mentality this way: "It is apparent that everybody talking about excellence isn't going there."

We must ask, too, if today's excellence might not be tomorrow's ignorance. Ability to pass examinations and accumulate high grades is a prized academic achievement. But do they serve one well outside the ivy-covered walls in a rapidly changing world? We have no irrefutable data to indicate that they will. Perhaps, then, we should heed Margaret Mead's admonition that no one will live all his life in the world into which he is born.

Our world is changing in size, in complexity, and in the degree in which each man must play a social, political and economic role—to mention three obvious characteristics. Perhaps striving for excellence in adaptability to the needs of this world is all that the school should hope to develop. This is no small undertaking.

### *The Purpose of Education*

In its most recent statement, the mature and respected Educational Policies Commission stated that the central purpose of American Education is the development of the ability to think. The commission, if one wishes to be critical, did not state about what one should think, or to what end. But the objective is an admirable one and one which brings nods of approval from all educational corners of our nation.

In a brilliant article in *Phi Delta Kappan*[6] Professor Theodore Brameld of Boston University criticized the EPC position for its lack of essential direction, and logically demonstrated that in today's world the central purpose of education must be national survival.

I do not wish, at this time, to quarrel with either of these positions. But I must ask if "excellence" in ability to think really

[4] From *Daedalus*, Fall, 1961.
[5] October 21, 1961
[6] October, 1961

consists in ability to regurgitate descriptive statements. I think it does not, although this is what most tests measure. Would excellence in national survival consist of dropping the first fifty megaton bomb? Or preventing the enemy from dropping any? Or just a few?

To those of you who had hoped that in my talk I might include a few ideas on how you might get your pupils to spell more accurately; or how you might really get effective writing under way; or what can you do to make use of children's interest in educational television; to all of you I offer an apology. I offer also an explanation.

I have spoken to you out of my concern for teaching, for pupils, and for our world. I might have described a situation where a teacher did teach her pupils to spell more effectively. But I would have merely described. Why the pupils spelled better, I could not have told you—only what they did and what the teacher did.

But I have the feeling--and perhaps now you do, too—that even in talking about spelling I should have brought in my concerns for the overbearing role which science is playing in our world and the fetish "excellence" which may plague our schools for years to come. Perhaps I resemble a professor of zoology at the University of Munich described in J. Robert Oppenheimer's book, *The Open Mind.* It seems that the professor always followed the practice of asking candidates for the doctorate about the nature and activities of worms. His preoccupation with worms got around so that young men, coming up for their exams, boned up on worms. One day the old duffer flabbergasted a candidate by asking, "What do you know about elephants?" Shaken but resolved, the candidate began his recitation: "The elephant is a large animal with a worm-like trunk; worms are divided into the following classes." And thus he went on and on, about worms. Perhaps I should have talked about spelling, but I am certain that it would come out W-O-R-M-S.

### *The Teaching Act*

I am deadly in earnest when I say that I can only tell you what a teacher does and what her pupils do when she teaches them to spell correctly. What happens *between* the two, I know not. Perhaps this lyrical excerpt from an essay entitled "On Learning," written by Professor John R. Seeley, a member of the faculty of York University, Toronto, Canada, will describe my ignorance, my humility, my concern:

> So they came upon him at the Fall of the year, when his garments lay heavy with the summer's dust and his heart moved in tune to the turning leaves. And they entreated him, saying "Speak to us now of Learning."
>
> For a space he sat without word or movement till some thought he had not heard them. At last he raised his head and, turning toward them, asked, "What learned ye in the silence?"
>
> And one answered, "Naught." And another said, "I did but wait impatiently upon your pleasure." And yet another, "I heard the stream and the flutter of a leaf toward its bridegroom, the breeze." And he inclined his head again, saying gently, "Be still." And a silence fell, except where a child shifted or a bird stirred, or a grass-stem, pressed to earth, sprang uncrushed toward the sun.
>
> At length he began to speak. So faint at first was his voice that only those closest caught his words.
>
> "I speak," he said, "with reluctance, and with regret do I shatter the silver shadow of your silence. Your belief is that it is in speech that you learn of me, or of one another. And in speaking I fear to give countenance to that belief. Verily, it is not thus. You learn not in the hot market-place of discourse, but in the cool temple of your peace. When all else is silent within you, you learn, as you make over in your inmost dwelling place what you have sought in your brief visit in the world. What you seek is not to be sought and seized, but waited upon and made welcome."
>
> And he paused again for he saw that they were troubled.
>
> "Oft," he began again, "have you called me your teacher. I have allowed it as the symbol of your longings, though I have never called you my pupils or sought any man for discipline.

None is worthy to be called another's teacher, and none truly able to teach another. No man can know what another is called to do, and not knowing his vocation, how shall he teach him? No man can tell truly where another man is, and not knowing his location how should he know whither to cast his words? No man can enter into another man's nature. How shall he then know on what food that other ought to feed?"

And one answered, "But you *have* taught. And we *have* learned. And we are not the poorer for it."

"Ay," he said, "I have oft spoken. It is in my nature to speak as it is in the nature of the bird to sing, and as it is in the brook, when it is full, to run. And I doubt not that you have learned of me, even as I have learned of you. But it is not of your teaching that I have learned, for you never deemed yourselves to be teaching. I learned oft from what you said, and yet more from what you did not say. I learned of you when you were with me, but also and oft from the golden echo of your absence. I have learned of you without your willing, though nothing without your unspoken consent. Even so have I learned of this flower." And he turned slowly in his hand the glory of a full-blown poppy. "It has not willed my learning. But neither has it hidden its face nor masked its being from before me."

"So also have you, doubtless, learned of me, but not often what I taught, and still less what I desired for you."

And they wondered at his saying.

"What I have desired for you," he began again, "is that your needs be met, though I know not what your needs are. And what I have wished is that your desire be wed of its desiring, though I do not know what it is that you desire. But what I tell you springs from my need and my desire, even when I think of you as my companions and seek to compass you in my love."

"I know you would have it otherwise," he said, seeing their faces shadowed and the light of their eyes clouded. "You would that I choose between serving you and ministering to my own desire and need. Or you would have it that I should mediate between us like a just father between himself and his children. It cannot be so. I cannot serve you by disserving myself. I am not your father, and you are not my children. I may not set aside my own needs in a fatherhood that is false or a ministry that could but demean you. Nor may I judge between us, for I judge then in my own case."

And they were troubled, and felt removed from him, as if the sun of his love in which they trusted had drawn a cloud about itself under the arch of heaven. And he felt for their trouble and had pity of their sorrow.

And he opened his arms toward them. "You look for me to give," he said, "but I can give only of what I have; and even of what I have, I can give no more than you will take. More: what you can take is not, though you may wish it, in the keeping of your will or the care of your self-commanding. You cannot be quenched of a thirst that you do not have, nor sated of a hunger that you do not feel. If you eat, out of care, when you have no hunger, or if you drink from prudence, though no thirst be upon you, you are neither fed nor slaked. Your drink is then a surfeit and your food is but a burden. The hungers of any of you are not one, but many. And the hunger of one is not the hunger of another. How then shall I feed you?"[7]

I have never encountered a passage which describes so magnificently the teacher-pupil relationship. I trust you will not let the lyricism obscure for you the powerful insights into the complex art of teaching given us by Professor Seeley.

### *The Tolerance of Time*

I turn again, as I conclude, to Poet Auden. His words, you recall, were:

> Time that is intolerant
> Of the brave and innocent
> And indifferent in a week
> To a beautiful physique,
>
> Worships language and forgives
> Everyone by whom it lives. . . .

We who by virtue of our concerns and products have earned Time's tolerance must ever be aware that in teaching language we are teaching children how to live, how to find life's purposes. We become a part of our pupils in love and in despair. They become as they love.

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